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281510Z Jan 04

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000206

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES: PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS ROLANDO MORALES

1. (U) Dr. Rolando Morales Chavez (47) of the Union Nacional para la Esperanza (UNE) party was elected President of Congress on January 14, 2004, as part of a governability pact negotiated between the ruling GANA party and the center-left UNE and center-right PAN blocks in Congress. Morales is a close political ally of UNE Secretary General (and unsuccessful Presidential candidate) Alvaro Colom.

2. (U) Morales is a medical doctor by profession, with a medical degree from the San Carlos University of Guatemala and an MPA from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has been active in center-left politics since 1993. He ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1995, and was one of the founders of the DIA party in 1997. He again ran unsuccessfully for Congress on the far-left ANN slate in 1999, and joined the UNE in 2001. He was elected to Congress on UNE's national list in November, 2003.

3. (U) Morales is married to Lucy Lainfiesta, a social worker who is also active in UNE. They have two children. Morales speaks fluent English, but prefers to use Spanish in official meetings.

Revolutionary Past

4. (SBU) There are unconfirmed reports that Morales provided medical assistance to members of the Armed People's Revolutionary Organization (ORPA) during the internal conflict.

Victim of Electoral Violence

5. (U) Morales was shot twice (in the leg and hand) by unknown assailants on November 9, 2003, only hours before the voting centers opened for the first round of the 2003 general election. His aggressors made no attempt at robbery, and the attack was widely believed to have a political motive.

Early Signs: Dialogue, Transparency, and Human Rights

6. (SBU) Since his appointment as President of the Congress, Morales Chavez has sought to facilitate dialogue with other political factions and to increase transparency in Congress. He publicly opened the ceremonial door of the Congress building and its galleries to the public, after former President of Congress Efraim Rios Montt had ordered them shut four years ago. Morales met publicly with Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales shortly after taking office, publicly promising to consider increasing funding for the Ombudsman's office. He also publicly expressed his personal support for a proposed International Commission to Investigate Clandestine Groups (CICIACS).

7. (SBU) At a January 26 meeting with the Ambassador, Morales invited members of the Governing Board of Congress from other parties to attend, and projected a warmly collegial style. He was clearly comfortable with USG interlocutors and professed a commitment to work together with us on areas of shared interest. In a telcon the following day with the Ambassador, he said he had expressed publicly his support for a renewal of authority to conduct joint anti-drug exercises and operations in Guatemala.

HAMILTON